

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

December 2, 2004

**COYOTE HELLYER COUNTY PARK
BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL**

File No. 04-057

Project Manager: Amy Hutzel

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to Santa Clara County to assist in the completion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail at the Coyote Hellyer County Park.

LOCATION: Coyote Hellyer County Park is located along the Coyote Creek recreational corridor at the southeastern end of the City of San Jose, in central Santa Clara County. (Exhibit 1).

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following Resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31164 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to Santa Clara County to construct trail improvements at Coyote Hellyer County Park in Santa Clara County. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, Santa Clara County shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. A work program, budget, and schedule;
2. The names and qualifications of any contractors or subcontractors that the County intends to employ to implement the project;
3. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals for the project have been obtained;
and
4. A sign plan.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the authority of the Conservancy under Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164 regarding projects of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department (“the County”) is proposing to construct improvements to an approximately 1/2 mile segment of the Coyote Creek Trail within Coyote Hellyer County Park. The Coyote Creek trail system is an extremely popular weekday alternative transportation commuting route as well as a highly used weekend recreational facility. The proposed segment is the primary alignment of the Ridge Trail, connecting the Diablo Range to the east and the Santa Cruz mountain range to the west through the City of San Jose. This segment is the northernmost segment controlled by the County and would complete the 16-mile paved, multi-use Coyote Creek Parkway within their jurisdiction.

The project involves much needed improvements to a makeshift dirt trail. The trail will be designed to better accommodate pedestrians, mountain bikes and equestrians. The new paved trail will be 10’ wide with 2’ gravel shoulders on either side and will be slightly realigned to be farther away from Coyote Creek. Construction will also include drainage improvements and minor retaining walls along some segments of the trail. Trail development and maintenance will be done in accordance with the “County Wide Trails Master Plan” and “Uniform Interjurisdictional Trail Design, Use, and Management Guidelines”.

Coyote Hellyer County Park is a 205-acre urban park is located in the heart of Santa Clara County’s regional park system. The Coyote Creek, which meanders through the center of the park, is the focus of the park’s natural environment. Thick undergrowth and tall trees characterize the well defined creek channel which is home to many different species of wildlife. Visitors to the park can escape from the nearby hustle of city life and enjoy the quiet solitude of Coyote Hellyer County Park and the Coyote Creek Parkway. In the Countywide Trail Master Plan, this segment is designated as part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment, part of the regional Juan Bautista de Anza Trail alignment, and part of the County subregional Coyote Creek / Llagas Creek Trail Alignment.

Coyote Hellyer County Park is surrounded by densely populated residential areas. This project will improve access to businesses, school, recreation, and park facilities. The Coyote Creek Trail is one of Santa Clara County’s most highly used recreational and commuter trails, serving local residents and a much broader regional user base. Examples of the nearby facilities served by this trail are: picnic sites, two lakes, the Coyote Hellyer velodrome, a disk golf course, Coyote Ranch corporate/group picnic concession, Encinal School, Coyote Creek golf course, a radio controlled model airplane area, and existing City of San Jose trails to the north of the project area, Shady Oaks Park, and Metcalf Park.

Project History: The Conservancy is a major partner in helping to implement the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The Conservancy has approved more than \$3 million dollars in grants for planning and project implementation, helping complete more than 40 miles of new trail. This project would continue to build connections between existing trail segments and help complete the more than 500-mile trail along the ridgeline of the San Francisco Bay.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000
Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation	<u>\$245,000</u>
Project Total	\$495,000

The requested Conservancy funds are expected to come from the FY 03/04 California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40) appropriation for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. As discussed below, implementation of the Bay Area Ridge Trail is one of the goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program enabling legislation codified at Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31160 to 31164). That chapter directs the Conservancy to address the resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area in a “coordinated, comprehensive, and effective way.”

Pursuant to Section 31162, the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay area that help to achieve various goals, including the goal of increasing public access “to and around the bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open space, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife, including wetlands and other wildlife habitats through completion and operation of regional bay, coast, and ridge trail systems, and local trails connecting to population centers and public facilities, which are part of a regional trail system and regionally adopted master plans and general plans, and through the provision and preservation of related facilities, such as interpretive centers, picnic areas, staging areas, and campgrounds.” The proposed project plan for completion of the Ridge Trail in Coyote Hellyer County Park in Santa Clara County.

Section 31163(a) directs the Conservancy to cooperate with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay area. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council’s “Regional Needs Briefing Book.”

The proposed project satisfies the criteria for determining project priorities under Section 31163(c) in the following respects: 1) the Ridge Trail is a multijurisdictional resource; 2) the Ridge Trail serves a regional constituency; 3) the Coyote Hellyer project can be implemented in a timely way; 4) the Coyote Hellyer project provides an opportunity for benefits that could be

lost if the County is unable to construct the trail improvements; and 5) the project includes significant matching contributions from the County.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

This project will complete planning work to open approximately ½ mile of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The project helps to implement Goal #11, Objective B of the Conservancy's strategic plan which seeks to develop an additional 60 miles of the Ridge Trail.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See "Project Financing" above.
3. **Support:** There is a great deal of local support for the project from trail users and members of the local community. The Responsible Organized Mountain Pedalers (ROMP) is a local cycling club with over 400 members. Members have expressed great enthusiasm for functional urban trail connections for everyday commuter use. Further comments highlight how the proposed project will allow individuals to connect with their communities and the outdoor environment, linking parks, people and communities. The project is supported by the City of San Jose, Santa Clara County Supervisor Donald Gage, State Senator Vasconcellos, and Assemblymember Diaz. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 2.
4. **Location:** This project is located in Santa Clara County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Without matching funds, Santa Clara County cannot move forward in completing the necessary infrastructure and improvements for this trail segment.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Ridge Trail is truly a regional attraction. The 400-mile trail network offers spectacular views of the Bay Area and links many parklands and open space preserves. In addition, the Ridge Trail will be tied to the San Francisco Bay Trail and the California Coastal Trail systems, creating an extensive trail network. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council's "Regional Needs Briefing Book." The Coyote Hellyer County Park is a beautiful regional park and the Coyote Creek Parkway is an outstanding regional resource. The Park allows people from nearby urban areas access to the open space, riparian habitat, and spectacular views of the

surrounding ridgeline. In addition to the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Park provides links to both the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail and the coyote Creek / Llagas Creek trail alignment.

Additional Criteria

7. **Readiness:** The County has been anticipating funding for this project for two years. If approved, the County is committed to beginning work on the project in spring of 2005.
8. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
9. **Cooperation:** This project would be implemented through the cooperative effort of Santa Clara County and the nonprofit Bay Area Ridge Trail Council.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project is categorically exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”). The realignment and improvements to the existing trail are exempt under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15302, which exempts replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced, and Section 15304, which exempts minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval of this project.

